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WEDDING DAY

AND OTHER STORIES

1st U.S. of the author's 1st book

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WEDDING DAY
AND OTHER STORIES

KAY BOYLE

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FOR

LAURENCE VAIL

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EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF AN ANCESTOR

What a goldmine it was to come into the stable on an early morning that sparkled with rain and to start the horses tossing their manes on their shoulders, stamping and lashing with fury because she passed by them. Even more active was the one she slapped under the belly and threw the saddle over. She stood close to him, tapping him on the ribs with her knuckles until he blasted what breath there was in him straight out and drew his waist in tapering and fine. At the moment when she passed his head with the single bit in her hand he would stand quiet, venturing to crane out his head and nibble with his soft loose lips at her shoulder.

The smallest horse was the favorite, and when he saw her he lifted his trim hindlegs and shot them at the sides of the stall. His delicate hoofs ran like a regiment over the blackened timber. He kicked in a frenzy, but his eyes were precisely on every move

she was making, and his teeth, small and sweet and unlike a horse's teeth, were ready to smile. Even with his ears flat as a rabbit's as he kicked, there was a flicker of knowledge in the tips of them that waited patiently for her decision of whether she would fling the saddle over him or whether she would go on to another stall, leaving him ready to cry with impatience.

Her father was proud of the feminine ways there were in her, and especially of the choir voice she used in church. It was no pride to him to hear it turned hard and thin in her mouth to quiet a horse's ears when some fright had set them to fluttering on the beak of its head. But at a time when the Indian fires made a wall that blossomed and withered at night on three sides of the sky, this grandmother was known as one of the best horsewomen in Kansas.

They were used to seeing her riding with a sunbonnet on her head, not in pants, but with wide skirts hullaballooing out behind her in the wind. At this time of the century nobody was very particular about the great length of the distances covered, and a day's ride from one town to another was like nothing at all. Kansas was like any other place on

the map to them, and there was nothing strange about it to their minds. The horses that grew up there were simple enough not to shy away from skirts that slapped at their sides, and reserved their skittishness for lightning or for the occasion of the moon rising suddenly at night out of the dust of the highway. Trains were no trouble to them, for they could see them only in the distance on an edge they never approached, and cows that they knew capable of ripping open their sides they had no antics for but cowardice. Smoke was another thing too remote to be taken into account. They were used to seeing it along the edge of the prairie, twisting up from the Indian encampments and becoming a part of the wind woven of many odors that blew through the long tunnels of their noses but never interfered.

To her father it was a real sorrow that a needle and thread were never seen in her fingers. His wife was dead and it seemed to him that he must set flowing in his daughter the streams of gentleness and love that cooled the blood of true women. The idea was that she be sweetened by the honey of the ambitions he had for her. There was this irritation in him that could not be quieted: her indifference to the things that were his, his house, or the color and

strength of his beard, and her interest in the sumac trees at the time they were ripe, or the sky with the crows flying across it in search of the shortest distance between two points (and finding it with a dignity and patience that was a shame to mankind).

Her father would listen for her to come down the hill from the stable, for she would often be singing aloud as she came around the side of it. It was he who had first taught her to ride, and even in the first months before year after year in the saddle had rubbed any tenderness out of her behind, he had seen her way with horses. What she had no pity for, but a kind of arrogance instead, was for the melting eyes, the rich false chocolate drops of despair in a horse's head. But a horse's eye rolled in the socket back at her in fear over his foaming shoulder, tied fast with its own bloody veins, was a treasure. Rather than see this fact in her, her father preferred to lower his gaze and contemplate the patent tips of his boots.

One day as she was coming down from the stable he heard this miracle: she was singing and her voice struck some hollow in the opposite hill and curved and warbled there like the voice of a second singer. For a full minute he stood listening while the two

voices sung together, her own voice deep and voluptuous and full like that of an older woman, and the other voice fresh and thin singing always a note or two behind the other. Once she rounded the side of the barn there was nothing more to it, and she came down singing, and not suspecting that the other hill had taken the notes out of her mouth and piped them back at her father.

To please him maybe, but he was never sure enough if it were for that, she'd do the things that were to be done in the kitchen. She could stuff a cod very nicely, stitch up its belly and see that it baked. From the French side she had learned to put fresh mackerel in kegs with white wine and lemon peel and a bouquet of spice. But on these occasions her beautiful red hair would be pulled back from her face, tight into a net at the back of her head, as naturally as if it had of itself recoiled in distaste from the monotony of the tasks performed before it.

There was a special flavor to the snuffle that a mount splattered out of his nose on the wind and back onto the face and mouth. What a feast of splatters when she would come out from a long time in the kitchen and walk in upon the beasts who

were stamping and sick with impatience for her in the barn. She would find them sick of every hole in the stall-boards, and of the hay-fleas jumping through the fodder in the manger, and of the soft balls of manure packed solid in their hoofs. An ovation of splatters would shower out before her. It was early fall and black as a pocket when she came out from a whole day in the house and saddled the smallest horse and rode him out the door.

Her father saw her riding off alone this way and he sat home thinking of the things that might become of his daughter. He sat away from the window thinking that the sight of the darkness outside was no help to him and that with his paper down on his knees and his eyes closed he was better off. Outside she was riding away, any way, hammering off through the darkness with nobody knowing what was going on inside her or outside her, or what she was filled with, the hoofs of the horse hammering tack-tracks in the blackness that was maybe the road, or the dust, or the prairie that blew richly from side to side. Her father was thinking that someday she might go off and be married, and he was willing for her to marry a gentleman someday, but these were not the feminine ways he thought of stirring

in her. He was more concerned with the cooking and the sewing ways that would be a comfort to him and keep him to his own satisfaction.

The thought of her marrying made him think of the schoolmaster who was the only gentleman in the countryside. He sat with the points of the fingers of his two hands together and with his elbows resting on the arms of his rocking-chair. He sat rocking gently back and forth with his thoughts, and then it came to him that early in the evening he had seen the young schoolmaster walking out as well onto the prairie. He had sat by the window watching the small strong figure of the schoolmaster making his way up the road over the prairie, and he began wondering how it would be to have the schoolmaster in the family, married off to his daughter and living with them there every day in the house. This was a quiet enough thought to him and it kept him rocking gently back and forth for awhile.

But with his daughter off in the night this way he became restless, and presently he started up and found himself at the window looking out for her. He was surprised to find that in the little time he had been sitting in his chair the moon had come up and was lighting up all the country around. He could see

very clearly the soft white flowering goldenrod, white as flax under the moon, and the deep valleys and gulfs of the whole blossoming prairie. All along the edge of it were the Indian fires burning hard and bright as peonies.

He asked himself what in the world his daughter could be doing out at this time of the night. It was such a strange thing that he crossed the room and went up the stairs that had a narrow ribbon of red carpet running down the middle of them like a spine. He opened the door of her room and he looked in, but the room was empty. Only with the lamp in his hand he saw something that caught his eye. It was the corner of a volume sticking out from under her folded quilt. Maybe she had intended to hide it away in her quilt, but the old man took it out by the end and turned its face up to the light. Poetry it was, he saw, with pictures engraved through it of a kind that brought the blood flying to his face. His fingers trembled on the fly-leaf and there he saw the name of the schoolmaster inscribed in the young man's long leaning hand, while the book itself had been left open at the picture entitled the "Creation of Eve." Under it he read the words the poet had written:

. . . To the Nuptial Bowre
I led her blushing like the Morn: all heav'n
And happie Constellations on that houre
Shed thir selectest influence; the Earth
Gave sign of gratulation, and each hill;
Joyous the Birds; fresh Gales and gentle Aires
Whisper'd it to the Woods, and from their wings
Flung Rose, flung Odours from the spicie Shrub,
Disporting, till the amorous Bird of Night
Sung Spousal, and bid haste the Eevening Starr
On his Hill top, to light the bridal lamp.

You fine example to the young, screamed the father's mind. You creeping out into the night to do what harm you can, creeping out and doing God knows what harm, God knows. He went quivering down the stairs, his mind in a fury. The low educated fellow forgetting his precious learning and out after the poor girl after dark on the prairie, he was thinking. Very clearly in his rage he could see the meeting of the eyebrows over the schoolmaster's nose, so hateful had he become to him, seeing them in detail, the black sprinkling of hairs that grew down between the schoolmaster's eyes. In his mind he thought of every part of the young man's face, and especially of the pores in the wings of his nose, and he began to walk back and forth in a fury in the house.

The horse on which the grandmother was riding had come to some kind of incline in the ground, and there he slowed his pace and began feeling his way with great delicacy through the bushes that flowed back over his thin knees. The grandmother's hands let the rein ride loose on his neck, and he flicked his ears forward and back in the dark for some sound from her. He kept chewing with his teeth at the bit in his mouth and tossing the rings of the mouthpiece so that they rang aloud. There was no movement even in her legs that hung down around his belly, and with the interest of selecting his own way absorbing him he watched the moon coming up without any display of fear, straining his ears almost out of his head as he followed it edging up ahead of him through the prairie-grass.

It was at this moment that he was startled by a faint stir in the bushes, and to quiet his heart's beating he drew several long cool blasts into his lungs the better to listen for what was to come. No help was given him by the grandmother who had never before abandoned him to his own wits, and trying to keep his head clear and away from fright he was left to discover all by himself that the wind had risen with the moon.

After the first moment it went out of his head to make a scene about the wind and he went on, pointing his ears to the sound of it in the grass and clicking his heels sharply on every stone he passed over. The wind was lifting off the bunches of white feather from the milk-weed pods that had burst dry and floury in the September night. It was taking the ripe milkweed seeds with the cotton crowning them and blowing them over the crust of the prairie. First it was this, a simple rising and falling of the breath as the tufted seeds went, and then as fold of the wind opened on fold, out they came in a tide leaving the empty husks rattling and hissing like snakes behind them.

Presently the milk-weed blow had strengthened so that it was sweeping across the whole upper reaches of the prairie. To the eye it seemed knee-deep and ravenous, but it came only to the crests of the little horse's hoofs and there washed delicately about them. He gave many humorous leaps and cavorts in the blowing tide, spraying it with splutter from his nose and sidling prettily up to the moon. Only when he ventured a sharp glance out over any distance did the terror of the enormous shifting plain, seething as it was with the milkweed blow, disturb him.

This was tame idle sport, suited to ladies, this romping in the milkweed cotton across the miles of pie-crust. Suddenly he felt this anger in the grandmother's knees that caught and swung him about in the wind. Without any regard for him at all, so that he was in a quiver of admiration and love for her, she jerked him up and back, rearing his wild head high, his front hoofs left clawing at the space that yapped under them. She urged him to such a frenzy of kicking that he was ready to faint with delight. Even had she wished to now she could never have calmed him, and she started putting him over bushes and barriers, setting his head to them and stretching him thin as a string to save the smooth nut of his belly from scraping, reeling him so close to the few pine trunks that streamed up like torrents that he leapt sideways to save his fair coat from ripping open on the spikes of them. It was a long way to travel back, but he never stopped until his hoofs thundered into the barn that had shrunk too small for him. There he stood in the darkness, wet and throbbing like a heart cut out of the body.

The leap of the grandmother down off his back startled him into such terror that he sprang off as light as a frog across the boards of the floor. The

leather of the saddle was steaming with his sweat, and after she had stripped him she brushed him down quickly and slapped him into his stall.

In the parlor of the house the father was sitting quite still at the table. He was asking himself in great pity how he was to know what had become of her during the night. A great many things that had nothing to do with it went through his mind, and one thing was that it was sad to have no one of his own time to talk to. When she came into the room she was there in front of him in the same way that the roses on the floor were woven straight across the rug. Where have you been to, he wanted to say to her, but he could not bring himself to speak. With someone of his own years, maybe, speech would already have been running nimble between them. He was ready to say right out that he had seen the schoolmaster walking out early in the evening up on the road that led nowhere except out onto the prairie. Well, now, what have you been up to with the schoolmaster, he was ready to say.

But the grandmother in anger had picked up her book from the table and put it close to her under her arm. In his sorrow for himself the father turned his head away from the sight of her. With this woman

in the room with him he was beginning to see the poor little schoolmaster, the poor squat little periwinkle with his long nose always thrust away in a book. He began to remember that the horse his daughter had been out riding all night had once backed up on just such a little whipper-snapper as was the schoolmaster and kicked his skull into a cocked hat. He began to worry for the sake of the schoolmaster who was such a timid little fellow and not used to Kansas, who might get into harm's way.

The father kept turning his head away from the sight of this woman. She stood by the table with her eyes staring like a hawk's eyes straight into the oil lamp's blaze. The farm and the prairie, he thought in anger, and the sky with the moon in it would only be remembered because this woman would carry them off in her hard heart.

"What have you done to the schoolmaster?" he wanted to say to her. The words were right there in his mouth but he couldn't get them out.

BITTE NEHMEN SIE DIE BLUMEN

One day there was a sports tournament in the town and Peleser was going to go and be in the tug-of-war of the Frenchmen against the Englishmen. We went off together with the other men and women, and I was pushing the baby-carriage out ahead of me, and walking through the dirty parts of the town to come to the field. There were marks of people's feet all through the dust of the sidewalks and I kept looking at the marks and thinking they might be the Englishman's feet that had passed there before us. We came into the place and it was a long time before I could find him, with the people confusing me and pushing against the baby's coach. Then he came up to the edge of the fence at the runway to us, and he talked French to Peleser with short quick breaths, and bitterly, like a German, as if he did not like the taste of it in his mouth. He snapped open his case and held it out for me to take a cigarette from him, and when

I began to take it Peleser said no, that women in England didn't. And the Englishman said unless one is abandoned. The music was playing I Cant Get Over A Girl Like You I Cant Get Over A Girl Like You Loving he was disdaining to hum, but it escaped through his teeth. He said that the girls in London were in love—in love—in love with Layton —or was it Johnstone?—and pursued him with five hundred cigarette packages of Gold Flakes—or was it Greys? I took a cigarette from him and when he lit it for me he was so close to me that I felt his body alive through the bars of the fence. Then he went off among the others and always I had a contempt for men with little feet and here I was watching his feet at the ends of his fine legs as if I could never see enough of them. I was waiting to hear his voice singing God save the king with an arrogance I despised but which ran in beautiful rivers down his throat. This arrogance in him, so narrow, so small, so undistinguished it was. I would look at him and decide that because he was British he could be classified, and he would be in that class of men who are doing manual things, working with their hands, with a proud narrow rigidity in their minds telling them they were too good for their

work. He was conscious of these things: of disliking cocktails and of his family whom he always would be snubbing it seems (yet never deeply or bitterly enough) because they had not educated him.

I stood in the sun with the bars of the runway piercing my elbows and my new gloves and the band in the middle of the grass was playing Oh Rose Marie I Love You and he was going back and forth on the balls of his feet making his calves bulge out in his white skin, with his blue socks hanging down over his track shoes, and his trunks fitting in well over his thighs. I could see him drawing his shoulders in so that they would not be so magnificent and his hands were stuck away in his pockets and I thought he was beautiful with a clean unsubtle beauty that was as dull as a Grecian man's body. He would turn about to look over the people, and he would seek among them a bit as if he had forgotten where he had left me, preparing it in his face the expression that would come of it, preparing it in his mind and in his body so that no one need recognize what existed between us.

I knew there was nothing existing between us and I thought it is foolish to be having your mind on this man. I knew I had turned like an old maid

now, when I met a man I wanted to wound him. I would think of the scars that death had put between my eyes, and I would think that even my love could not tell him of all that had dried up in me. Too much has happened that even my heart could not explain to you, I would think. So every morning I would come down to the table and talk to the women about feeding the baby, and the rain, and Sundays I would push the baby carriage up into the park and listen to Peleser and the other men talking rubber over the table, and joking about the lemon-pop and ice-cream with an intensity that demanded something else of England. Every morning I brushed my hair back straight as a board from my face, and I thought my hard hands and my hair turning grey will tell you what my mouth can never say to you. And every morning this man would come down to the table and sit at the end of it and listen over his paper to whatever I would be saying about the bottles or the rain. And once we were alone at the table after the others had gone off and he was opening his egg with one stroke of his knife across it, and he was being English and discreetly amazed to find me alone at the table with him. He asked me for the salt and then he handed me the *Times* with his

thumbnail on what he had been reading and it said that only in England were wives accepted in their true sphere. In his mind he was putting quotation marks around the last two words of the sentence to show that there was so much he was superior to. Here he was wanting me to believe that he was starting a conversation, and all I could see was a stupidity, but a stupidity handled with such grace that it might almost deceive one. So I looked at the article as though it had never been written and I said that the advertisement concerning a pony and governess cart was particulary seditious.

On Sundays I began to see him in the parks, having tea alone with his hat on a chair beside him and his gloves and cane laid across the seat. His hair was bright and smooth and his lashes were as stiff and white as wheat. And I would be talking with the other Frenchwomen about the things we would be eating all the week, and he would be far from me having tea alone this way, looking arrogantly about at the tables, arrogantly and with a sort of false humility that I despised. He would walk out of the place sometimes before we were done, with his gloves in one hand and his hat worn-out to that degree of good-taste that cannot be imitated, turning his head

so as to see me and not to see me, and my heart would go suddenly black and desolate and I would push the strawberries away under the cottonwood leaves that hung over from the jar on the table and sit making beaches and seas with the pepper and salt.

Everything in me was against him and I thought that I would not be beginning again but would get my mind off this man. And here I was beating the fence with my fists because he was running the course, and I was thinking that for a turn of his body I would be leaving Peleser and making a new life with this man. I would be doing this for no reason at all except that he was beautiful to me. I knew that no matter what would come that I could be faithful, that I could believe in these small ways of his, and that I would be contented to be with him because his small ambitions were so much more important to him than any ambition ever could be to me, that always he would make his own small needs so important that I would be in worship and despise before him. I would believe in his being a clerk, all of it, all of it I would accept and believe in, because it was so important to him to be so. And when he wanted to break away and be a strange man walking across Europe, I would be

that too, because everything he did had such a majestic, an awful dignity and importance to him.

The Frenchmen and the Englishmen were beginning to pull on the great rope for the tug-of-war. They were in blue combinations and three people pointed out to me who was Peter Lind and Peleser said didn't he clip the wings of the geese in Lagerlof's Nils, and they said no, that he made saucepans. In the heat the men were all flattened out pulling on the rope with their feet seeking to grip into the soil and their eyes trying to burst from their heads. I watched Peleser and I thought that perhaps he would die this way, hanging and pulling on the rope to show he was better than the English. His heart was swelling in his throat and his hands were as tense and as lazy as crabs. The Englishman was bounding about on his toes wanting to cry out to his countrymen but holding and biting his passion in his teeth so that none of it should escape him. And then the English had pulled the Frenchmen over the mark and when the rope sagged down Peleser and the others went over in the dust. The Englishman had run over to Peleser and was drawing him up by the armpits and setting him again on his feet. The English had pulled harder than the

French and the Englishman's face beside Peleser was discreetly secure. I was angry knowing that it had never been a doubt in him that the French would lose in the tug-of-war.

So when I came into the hallway of the boarding-house the Englishman was going upstairs and he turned back in the dark and down the stairs to me he said I am afraid we are nationally opposed. I was cracking nuts out of my pocket and dropping the shells of them on the floor and in irritation he picked them up as they dropped at my feet and put them into the basket. It being only in England I said yes, yes, he said let me finish. His eyes went back and forth across my face. It is just he said that whenever an Englishman meets someone he likes he is sorry he is sorry that the person is not English. He was picking up the little broken shells of of the nuts and dropping them finely into the wicker basket. And suddenly I was filled with a black anger and I said come out of it for once and stop being the perfect the gentleman what kind of a man are you why I know what my little girl is and what my little boy is I know because they open their mouths and yell and if they don't want a thing they spit in its eye. I threw down the shells of the nuts but he

was holding onto the bannisters and in his heart he was deploring, deploring that a foreign woman was being hysterical and was making a scene for him in the hallway of a boarding-house. Never would he get away from the idea of an Englishman being made important this way in the stairway of a boarding-house. Listen I said you're perfectly safe all right seeing yourself always in situations where you've got all the superiorities where you can go upstairs and close your door and spend the evening deploring deeply deploring regretting lamenting unfortunate interviews but for God's sake don't begin doubting that you've got all the superiorities because then you'll be something else again. He said please, please, wearily with his hand lifted and I went past him up the stairs to my room it is impossible he said you insist upon too much what I said was.

I brushed my hair back straight from my face and put a lot of rouge on my mouth and I went to dinner in a dress without any sleeves to it. I was eating and watching the holes at my wrists coming and going as I cut up the meat on my plate. On the table there were marigolds and ferns in a vase and he was on the other side of them and I

wouldn't lift my head to see over or around them. They were serving us spaghetti and I didn't know if he were cutting it up or twisting it on his fork and when the pudding came on he put his head around the flowers. When he looked at me I felt that my flesh lit like a candle. I looked at him as if I could never see enough of his face and I saw that he was humbled and that he was silenced by the sad proud humility of his heart. He was handing the menu to me and I didn't know if I were taking it in my fingers or letting it fall, and across it he had written Aber Gott Bitte Nehmen Sie Die Blumen . . .

WEDDING DAY

The red carpet that was to spurt like a hemorrhage from pillar to post was stacked in the corner. The mother was shouting down the stairway that the wedding cake be held aloft and not bowed like a venerable into the servants' entrance. Oh, the wedding cake. No one paid any attention to the three magnificent tiers of it. It passed into the pantry, tied in festoons of waxed paper, with its beard lying white as hoar frost on its bosom.

This was the last lunch and they came in with their buttonholes drooping with violets and sat sadly down, sat down to eat. They sat at the table in such a way that she flew into a rage and asked them to sit up please to sit up as if they were eating at the same table as if they were of the same flesh as blood not odd people at a lunch counter. Every bouquet that arrived blossoming forth from its gilded or from its pure white basket, softened the sharp edge of her tongue.

"Have you decided to give your daughter the copper saucepans?" he said.

At this the mother collapsed. She deflated in her chair and pecked feebly at the limp portions of strawberries that remained on her plate. But a drop too much of that black arrogance she had inherited and could not down said No, a thousand times in every scale. NO she said. The pride of the kitchen to be scratched, burned, buttered and dimmed. At the thought of them her heart swelled in an agony of sorrow. She was an old woman, fine arrogant old lady that she was, and the saucepans hung in the kitchen like six bull's-eyes coldly reflecting her thin face with its faded top-knot of hair. Not a bite had been cooked in them for twenty years. NO swelled in her heart, brimmed in her eyes, until the two could have killed her in her chair.

"Don't cry," he said to her. He pointed his finger directly at her nose so that when she looked at him with dignity her eyes wavered and crossed. She sat looking proudly at him, erect as a needle staring through her one open eye.

"Don't," he said.

A thunderous NO now stormed at them, a bitter, hard, a childish no. A whimpering no. Your father

prized them highly. Your father, he prized them highly, she said.

Suddenly she turned upon her daughter.

"Your brother is looking for some trouble to make," she said grimly. "You see that, don't you. Don't you see that he's trying to make trouble between you and your young man?"

The three of them stared into one another's faces, and a look of bewilderment came upon the old lady's face. Why she was bewildered, she did not know. She knew quite well what she was about, but her son looked at her even more sharply, and he said:

"Who was it that wanted this wedding?"

"Certainly not I," said the old lady, and these words echoed what was in each one's mouth.

"I certainly did not want this wedding," the old lady repeated with emphasis, when she saw she had not been contradicted. "Your sister's choice has appalled me."

"Enough," shouted her son. "No one can question that, my sister's choice!"

The roast of beef made them kin again, and they sat watching the mother almost lovingly as she sliced the thin scarlet ribbons of it into the platter.

It was a beautiful roast, and it had scarcely been cooked at all. The son kept snatching bits of it away, and she heaped their plates full for them.

"I'm carvin' and carvin'," she was whimpering, "and I don't get anything to eat myself. Haven't ye had enough?" she said. She looked plaintively at them, her lip trembling as she looked into their faces.

"I'm going to take it under the table," said her son, "and snarl at anyone who comes near."

At this the brother and sister burst into laughter which rocked them back and forth and flushed them to the roots of their light hair. At the end he tossed his napkin over the glass bells of the chandelier and his sister followed him out of the room. Out they went to face the spring before the wedding, and their mother stood at the window praying that this occasion at least pass off with dignity, with her heart not in her mouth but beating away in peace in its own bosom.

Here then was April holding them up, stabbing their hearts with hawthorne, scalping them with a flexible blade of wind. Here went their yellow manes up in the air, turning them shaggy as lions. The Seine had turned around in the wind and in tufts

and scallops was leaping directly away from Saint-Cloud. The clouds were cracking and splitting up like a glacier; down the sky were they shifting and sliding, and the two with their heads bare were walking straight into the heart of the floe.

"It isn't too late," he said. "I mean it isn't too late."

The sun was an imposition, an imposition, for they were another race stamping an easy trail through the wilderness of Paris, possessed of the same people, but of themselves like another race. No one else could by the lifting of the head only be starting life over again, and it was a wonder the whole city of Paris did not hold its breath for them, for if anyone could have begun a new race, it was these two. Therefore, in their young days they should have been saddled and strapped with necessity so that they could not have escaped. Paris was their responsibility. No one else had the same delight, no one else put foot to pavement in such a way. With their yellow heads back they were stamping a new trail, but in such ignorance, for they had no idea of it.

And who was there to tell them, for the trees they had come to in the woods gave them no sign.

They were alone in the little train that ran on rails through the dead brush under the boughs and snapped around corners so smartly that it flicked them from side to side.

"It isn't too late yet, you know," he said.

At this moment they laughed. Here were their teeth alike in size as well as the arrogance that had put a proud arch in their noses. Wallop and wallop went the little train through the woods, cracking like castanettes the knuckles of their behinds.

When the train stopped, these two descended, stroked the sleek pussy willows, scratched them between the ears and watched the seals awhile skipping and leaping for ripples of fish in the spring light. "What I mean is," he said, "that I don't, I don't consider it too late."

Into a little boat they got and in a minute he had rowed her out to the middle of the pond. She sat buttoned up very tightly in her white furs. The brisk little wind was spanking the waters back and forth and the end of her nose was turning pink. But he, on the contrary, had thrown off his coat, thrown it to the bottom of the boat with his feet on it, and as he rowed he pressed the fresh mud of the spring that had clustered on his soles into every seam and

pocket of it. Back and forth went his arms, back and forth, with the little yellow hairs on them standing up in the wind.

"What a day for a wedding," he said.

As he spoke there was a sudden disturbance among the birds on the bank, and the swans streamed out after them in steady pursuit, necking and bowing after the boat with their smooth coats ruffling up in the wind. Around the boat gathered the swans, peering curiously at the new race, lifting their flat heads at an angle to fix the beaks of the new race in their scarlet eyes.

Down, down could the brother and sister see into the very depths of the pond. Down under the tough black paddling feet of the swans and below their slick wet bellies could be seen the caverns of the pond with flowers blooming under the water. Every reed was podded with clear bright bubbles of light closely strung, and the fish were waving under them like little flags, deep but clear in the water. Over them was the sky set like a tomb, the strange unearthly sky that might at any moment crack into spring.

"It isn't too late," he said.

A slow rain had begun to fall. It had begun to

rain and the fruit blossoms on the banks were bruised black with it. The rain was falling, it was running steadily down their cheeks, and they looked with glowing eyes at each other's faces. Everywhere, everywhere there were other countries to go to. And how were they to get from the boat with the chains that were on them, how uproot the willowing trees from their hearts, how strike the irons of spring that shackled them? What shame and shame that scorched a burning pathway to their dressing rooms! Their hearts were mourning for every Paris night and its half hours before lunch when two straws crossed on the round table top on the marble anywhere meant I had a drink here and went on.

"What a day for a wedding," he said as they came wearily, wearily up the street, dragging their feet through the spring afternoon.

They found their mother upon her knees in the hallway tying white satin bows under the chins of the potted plants. As they passed she was staring a cactus grimly in the eye. Before she turned to them she let fall one last reproving look upon the silver platter by the entry door. Once she had turned her back, her son kicked it smartly down the hall, and without a word of protest she pursued it. She

was convinced as she halted it and stepped firmly on the silver tray, that this outburst presaged a thousand mishaps that were yet to come.

But in peace the guests arrived, one after another and two by two, leaving their cards upon the platter and hastening forward to press their hostess' hand. The army was handsomely represented, and finally down the drawing-room came the bride on her brother's arm who was giving her away to the groom. With such a gesture he gave her away, and it was evident that she had no thought for her satin dress nor for the fine lace that was hanging down the back of it. Not a thought for the music did she have, nor a word for the reverend except yes and no. This was the end, the end, they thought. She turned her face to her brother and suddenly their hearts fled together and sobbed like ring-doves in their bosoms. This was the end, the end, the end, this was the end.

Down the room her feet fled in various ways, seeking an escape. To the edge of the carpet fled her feet, returned and followed reluctantly upon her brother's heels. Every piped note of the organ insisted that she go on. It isn't too late, he said. Too late, too late. The ring was given, the book was

closed. The desolate, the barren sky continued to fling down dripping handfuls of fresh rain.

Like a continental gentleman he slapped his thighs, exchanged jokes with the other gentlemen, and in his bitterest moments his eyes traversed the heads of the company and exchanged salute with hers. Her feet were fleeing in a hundred ways throughout the rooms, fluttering from the punch bowl to her bedroom and back again, and her powder puff fell from her bosom and was kicked by the dancers like a chrysanthemum around the floor. Over the rooms she danced, paused at the punch table, her feet like white butterflys escaping by a miracle the destructive feet of whatever partner held her in his arms.

The punch it was that daintily and unerringly picked out her brother's steps and made him dance, that took his joints and swung and limbered them, divined the presence of his antagonism and sent him jigging. He danced with the silver platter of cards held high and perilous, and as he danced from room to room he scattered the cards about him—a handful of army officers here, a handful of deep-bosomed matrons strewn across one shoulder. The greater part of the American Colony fluttered behind the piano as the mother, in triumph on the arm of the

General, danced lightly by. Her face was averted from the mesh of his entangling beard but in her heart she was rejoicing. If this were all she had to fear, she hummed: the cards could be gathered up, no glass had yet been broken. Up and down the winding roads, over the black cascades and the fountains, over the decks of the sardine-boats that were barging quietly in the hemp of the chinese rugs she danced. The punch had turned her veins to water and she felt her knee rapping sharply against the General's as she skipped. In triumph in his elderly arms, she sped away. What a real success, what a *real* success. Over the Oriental prayer rugs, through the Persia forests of hemp, away and away.

THEME

There was one woman a woman of habits who would come down early in the day to the fire while the coals were still as black as iron. She had strong red hair that she would unloosen and she would put her feet in the oven and sit watching the chestnuts cook in rows across the top of the stove. She would listen to the rats running about on their claws in the hallway and she would think of what a great master George Moore had been to her and that now there was no one. His books were put away among themselves on the shelf and she had said that when a man began to feed on the past it was time to leave off reading him. She was lonely but she would not go back to open his books or touch them even with her fingers. She would stay away from them and she would be afraid to read even the first ones again because of what had happened in her heart.

When the chestnuts were done she would crack

them in her big teeth and draw the worms out with the point of a pin. She had a long face like a horse's face and she would sit eating the chestnuts slowly in her mouth with her long chin swinging back and forth under her face. In her mind she would think of strong names and say them over to herself. They were names she called her son in her mind when he was a man and came home into the kitchen at night. He would come in and she would see him looking at her long face as she put out his soup for him. She knew she was ugly to him, with her great strong body and her bare arms out hard and white as salt; and in her heart she would be saying over the soft strong names to cradle his bones. She thought that if she had been a Russian mother she could have given him the words to make a wild music or a courage for him. But the Russians were humorless women, intense tasteless women all of a piece.

In the morning she would walk about in the house with her back and shoulders drawn in small from the cold. She would set the rooms straight and then the feel of her blood moving in her would set her mind off again talking to her son. "Well, well. . . ." she would see her voice like a bright

coin between them. "Well, after all what of the Russian writers." She would be leaning over the table in the kitchen to him so that her breasts hung down in points. She would be passing the bread over to him with her head on one side smiling. "I am an American woman so the Russians must always be strange old men to me. Even the *Cherry Orchard* was only the other side of an old man's mind, and then only for a moment."

She would be talking in her mind with her son and then she would see her long teeth in the mirror bared with her thoughts. She would stand with the dirt-rag in her hand and see her full eyeballs tied with veins and the heavy old flesh hanging down on her jaws. She would say "ah" to the mirror with her tongue out square like a beast's tongue. "Ah" and "is that so?" she would say. It was like a dance around the room to her to escape the mirror. And after that she would have a fine scorn for everything. She would have a sneer for all the old things in the room. "Tchekov and his femme!" she would say over the table. "The old bitch and his femme, ha. I'd like to have seen them, the dear queer people. I'd like to have seen them when no one else was about. She with her white face hang-

ing through her fingers and he with his foot in her mouth to stop her crying."

She would feel her own face long and heavy before her. She would be weary with the knowledge of her own heavy face hanging out before her. "God push my face up on me," she would say. "Push my face up till it is a round face with a crown of little ears about it." And her weariness went out over the table and fell on the backs of her hands. "I'm crying for you George Moore, George Moore," she would say. "Your storms would break the heart at the window, and every night your sorrow gnawed at my bones." She would hold the dirt-rag up to hide from herself the shape of her mouth crying. And then she would think of her strong hands, and the long strong bands of her red hair. "You and your balderdash with Balderston! You and your Frank Harris coffee!" But she would never go over and touch his books with her scorn because her heart was too sore.

When her son came in she would be silent. All day she had been talking to him but now there was nothing to say between them. He said he would be

going up to Chicago at the end of the month and she could only think of him sitting there while he said this looking at her dark old mouth and her hair. She thought it must be a sad thing for him to live with an old woman. Ah but if he knew what there was in her blood, she thought, he would be afraid to be in the room with her. Her body was crouched there in her and if she would straighten up and cry out to him she would give it to him like the back of her hand on his face. She set her knife and her fork carefully again at the sides of her plate, she turned her tongue in her mouth and touched the cloth of her dress with her long open palms. In her mind she said: "I am a fierce woman. I am a fierce woman who is not afraid of solitude. I am a black wind, boy. I am lean and gaunt and strong as the wind."

She opened her mouth and tears began to fall down her face and her voice was squeezed out of her throat to him.

"Ah, ah, I am an old woman," she said.

"No, no you are not an old woman."

Her head shook back and forth in anguish and she said: "I am an old old woman, what shall I do

with myself when you leave me?" In her heart she was sneering and she was saying: "I am a gaunt wind without fear, boy. I am a bleak wind that is strong alone."

She sat looking at her son and at his wrists thick like her own wrists and covered with blonde hair. He was like her own flesh bared before her and she was thinking that a son should be always a shy bird at the heart. He should be a thin bird to hold in her fingers, with feathers to lay smooth, and a black mad beak to pierce her. He should have small bones that she would follow with her hands until love was a sharp taste in her mouth. She would be salt-strong flesh covering him. She would say: "You are soft and gentle as a fawn to me . . . you are soft, soft in my arms as I carry you out of fire. . . ."

She went to a fortune-teller woman who would tell her in the cards what she wanted to know. The woman set out the cards, saying: "Whether or not your son will come back to you, . . . whether he'll come back to you, or whether he wont come back to you. . . ." She got up angry and said that wasn't what she wanted to know. But there was something

else to her anger. She left her long gloves on the woman's table and she was too angry to go back for them. The woman was a slavic woman with a face smooth like a nut. "I'm a mother too," she had said. "I am a mother." But she had not found out what it was with her cards and her long sly looks that the other had come to be told.

One day she went up to Chicago after him. She wanted to be a slavic mother, a dark slave mother to her son. She thought of the homage in her voice being a dark lullaby to him, she thought that he would come back to her and that she would carry books into the kitchen and read to him. She was thinking in anguish, "I can be many things to you. I can change into a soft skin for you." But when she talked to him of coming back she could see his mind between them seeing the kitchen and her face in the steam over the stove. She put her hands out across the table to him, thinking, "Ah, but there are other things I can be to you. . . ."

"I'm an old woman," she said. She thought her hands were beating fiercely on her breasts but he saw them opened out hard before him. "I'm an old, old woman," she said to him, shaking her head in

anguish. "Look at me, look at me . . . Look at my poor old face and come back to me."

"You never wanted a son," he said to her. He saw her face ugly with crying.

"Yes, yes," she said. "Yes, I wanted a son."

MADAME TOUT PETIT

One day in June the travelling-man brought a squirrel scarlet as holly to the little girl who was learning to walk around the garden. With the ends of her fingers she clung to the points of the rose bushes and the blades of iris flowers. In the air even there had been a sort of preparation for him, as if so much was expected of his coming up through the garden to the chimneys clean of coal and of fire, and in the garden the air itself was like a miracle blinding the eyes. He said I have brought an animal to your little girl who is learning to walk, and at intervals he averted his face and leaned down to pinch a daisy off its stem with his thumb and forefinger. The June afternoon had settled agreeably and gracefully down into a pleasant swoon, and beyond on the hills the English meadows were flowing steadily into the cropping muzzles of the cattle. The travelling-man was changing the cigarettes from their packet into his

case, and skipping lightly from side to side so that his shadow would fall upon and protect the little girl from the sun. Last June, he said, my family were waiting for me to come home from England, he said. And well, he said, do you know what I did? I went off with a little friend of mine up into the Alps for a week. Fancy, he said, I went off. And I thought it was this maybe that was always in the back of his mind, and this was what it was he always wanted to be saying to everyone until he would find the words in someone's mouth that would give him some ease from the rebuke in his own heart. And when I got home, he said. He stood tapping a cigarette in his hand and smiling steadily over the prostrate garden. My father had died. Fancy, he said. I mean after all there was nothing I could have done, was there, he said.

On Monday morning he went off in his car with his little blue alpine hat on one ear more than the other, and his road-map with Derby, Buxton and Nottingham large and brilliant, squared open on his knee. He had broken a red button from the rose tree as he went down through the garden, and it was in his coat, and when he closed the door his eyes returned and moved strongly across the win-

dows. In me even there was a sorrow that he was going away, for he went as if it were bitter for him, lingering and turning on his heels and slapping the little back pockets on his trousers.

Behind the house Madame Tout Petit crossed the bricks, balancing a saucepan of milk stained with coffee, walking carefully so that the wet earth would not spit its foul juices on her silk stockings.

"I cannot express to you," she said, "what has taken place in me. . . ."

And on Friday night there would be a preparation, as if a top had been set spinning in everyone's heart. The traveller would be coming in dusty and dark with his week's trip wearying and animating him. In the men there would be a solid absent preparation because he would be bringing them pipes maybe with the trademark of his business-house stamped on them, or be bringing them small clocks with gold faces. The men would come into the dining-room of the boarding-house and be pretending not to see him first, because in their minds they were wondering what he had brought this week to them. And he would sit, as if expiring and done with weariness, until they began talking to him. He was a Frenchman with a

soft voice, and so perfectly did he parrot the English that there was no telling him from one of them.

In me I would be pleased. I would come downstairs earlier at the end of the week to talk with him in the parlor. He had a sympathy for women which charmed his eyes into warm heavy tents and which set shadows in his cheeks when he smiled. He would tell me it was not a life for him, it was not a life with a night always in a different town, and the age of the other men who were travelling setting him apart by himself. And always this sort of thing, he said, which I think rather rum, rather rum (so like an Englishman that it was a disgrace to the race of them): " 'there was,' yes, 'there was an old lady of Sheen whose hearing was not very keen.' " And Madame Tout Petit would come in suddenly, smelling like a fresh rose in the parlor, and she would begin stitching at her embroidery and lifting her head brightly and rapidly when she spoke. When we talked English she listened sweetly and sharply with her head, and she laughed because the words collapsed before she could make any sense of them. Not a life, he was saying, not, you know, a life, and always the other men who are travelling with this

sort of thing in their mouths: she said it is odd but I cannot tell God save the Weasel from Pop goes the Queen.

The rooms are very small, he said, and the beds narrow as a board. He stood up and lit a cigarette on the end of his tongue. His beard was pushing stiffly against the dark skin of his jaw as if it must pierce his flesh and escape to protect him from the world. Mr. Dickens and Mr. Trollope, he said, having said all there is to say about voyagers, as if they were pigeons. I am not, he said distinctly, a pigeon. I am a man.

When I was married, said Madame Tout Petit brightly dropping her words through whatever his silence was suggesting. I cannot tell you what took place in me. My husband's hair had been curled up in a wave for the feast and the priest himself was slapping the holy water on it to make it lie flat. The priest himself. She shouted delicately with laughter. She looked at the travelling-man with her laughter scarring her face. *Bande de salauds*. Oh, rather, said the travelling-man. Oh, dear, dear, the Jesuits! He skipped across the room like a Nancy-boy. Madame Tout Petit's pure virtuous creed flamed in her face. I was speaking of

my husband and the others, she said in confusion. He handed out cigars to them all to keep them from making jokes about marriage. I cannot tell you, she said, what took place in me. I pinned the curtains of the canopy from top to bottom with nursery-pins and myself in the middle like a jelly-roll. Breath by breath her laughter exploded across the room.

There was going to be a dance in costumes and we had taken out my old grandmother's dresses, and one of these the travelling-man held up in front of him, and with the big skirts of it swinging around his thin body he danced between the table and the cooking-stove in the parlor. It is not often, he said, that somebody's conversation is not standing between us. He was deciding then which dress would be the oddest on him, and he sat down with a letter in his hand and read it to me, quickly as if before his mind would have time to change. And in this letter Madame Tout Petit had said to him that love without sincerity and without simplicity was a sorrow rather than a peace to her. Sophistication, he said, where is thy what-not. And her husband is rather a good sort, he said, rather, you know. He twisted the letter into a little cornucopia

of sun. Women resort to God bless you, he said. Because this thing has happened to me it is more beautiful than if it happened to any other woman. And I prefer her husband, said the travelling-man. He stood up. If I could find one woman to damn my soul to hell, said he. Oh, love, he said, and his mouth turned the points of his smile into his own flesh. Without the simplicity and the sincerity, he said. What shall I do with them? If I had my ears pierced the simplicity and the sincerity would make the nice earrings.

At dinner there was a Camembert on the table stinking and running in its own juices, and the travelling-man sat drinking his coffee with the other men, with the early darkness drifting in clear and sweet across their faces. He sat talking as if he could never draw himself up out of his chair; talking to them about the English roads and the left-handed way of driving, and the ashes of his cigarette fell like frost over his long legs. And then he came up to dress himself in my old grandmother's clothes, to leave his throat out bare and put rouge on the small lobes of his ears. He had a fine gold chain round one wrist and he was as happy and wondering before the glass as a young girl. His eyes had

a special wonder and admiration for his own face and throat, and when they came upon my face and my hands fastening the dress up his back, they collapsed in small indifferent bits as if my flesh intruded.

We were dancing together, and he would hop about on his feet with his legs doing the Charleston in the French way as if he could not afford to be ungraceful. And my old grandmother's shoulders had been fuller than his so that the sleeves slipping down he would keep putting back with his fingers. It is not a life, he said, it is not a life consisting of sleeping on a board. Madame Tout Petit clapped her hands and screamed with false delight. Oh, what a beautiful woman he is, screamed Madame Tout Petit, and her sorrow and her love for him were ready to fall in tears from her eyes.

I cannot tell you what took place in me, she said, when he appeared before me dressed as a woman. Slowly and steadily we walked in the dark warm garden. I cannot tell you. Am I asking too much of you? she said. To write again to him. This time, she said, you could perhaps, my darling, bring in a word or two concerning the eternal constancy of a *femme honnête*. I can forgive him, she

said, anything. And if he still refuses to respond, I shall ask the priest to employ me with charitable work in the parish. I shall succor the young, she said.

She turned wearily to the lighted windows in which the traveller and the other dancers were passing to the measure of the music.

"J'ai un cafard horrible," she said.

SUMMER

There had been a great rain so that although it was early August the leaves had begun to come down in the wind. The boards of the bench that was nailed against the trunk of the tree were black from rain and needled with rot, with scales of lichen laid between in the cracks. The old lady had gathered her skirt up as she sat and it hung in strong solid folds through her loose fingers. Leaf by leaf the hills of the country grew up through the boughs of the tree, and the distant goats in descent of the ledges were seen as if falling on stiff legs through the branches.

The face of the girl was like a narrow mirror set out under the tree. It reflected with bitterness the torn leaves which the rain had pressed down upon the grass, the grains of red pollen on the old lady's coat, and the lips drawn in in pity and solace about the flutter of the old lady's breath. To be with the

old, she thought, made nature a catalogue of parts. To sit with blood as still as a snail's track was to observe the pores of the mud and veins in leaves which action might signify as a soft wet embrace of the brow. To walk slowly without end or direction meant a perception for small objects only.

The girl began again, thinking this time of it, with an unreal rhythmic vigor, as . . . There had been a tremendous rain so that the leaves slapped down on their faces as they strode up under the swinging boughs. . . .

The old lady moved her head gently from side to side as the young man and his companion came past them. The girl sat at the old lady's soft elbow, thin and sullen and resentful of the discriminations of the mature. The odor of aged breath shifted at intervals across her nostrils.

"There is so much we must learn to avoid," said the old lady through the uncertain wings of her breath, "both in the female and the male. Instincts of breeding that direct one. . . ."

The path was set with large stones and was narrow, so that in climbing the hill the young man had dropped behind his companion and walked with his eyes on the movement of her legs under her

skirt. She was a youngish woman with a dark rich skin and black hair rolled in her neck.

"There is only the thickness of a hand's breadth of wall between us," said the old lady holding her delicate old hand up before her. "But do you think he considers that? As for me, you've remarked yourself that I've done the only thing possible under the circumstances, holding my head high as I pass him in the dining-room."

He was climbing on, up the hill, still slightly behind his companion. When he paused with her at an open space and turned to look down into the valley he thrust his legs apart and stroked his bare palms up and down the blonde throat of his cane. The girl could see his head thrown back on his neck and his lips moving under his moustache; and then the soft bark of his laughter coming down the hill to them. With her head swaying from side to side with her words, the old lady spoke again of the appetites of his fingers and of the disease that hung bright black in his eyes.

When the girl heard this she sat with a secret exultant shame burning in her, repeating it in her mind. She thought of the savage unknown appetites of his hands and body, and of the disease hung

like an omen in the black mad lamps of his eyes. It was a shaming fire in her that she must sit close to to shield and to cool with her own cold sullen flesh.

"They go up into the hills," said the old lady, "way back into the hills, and spend the whole day there."

The girl sat thinking of this, and listening to the old lady's voice in pursuit of the young man and his companion: the worn worn voice drawing strength from them as it went after them up the hill.

"I am not too old," said the broken voice in the old lady's throat, "to still feel resentment against the abuses of decency, decency."

The girl felt the old lady going quaveringly and fiercely on with them, closing the collar of the young man's shirt with her quivering fierce fingers, following them to know in an agony of outrage the separate blades of the grass crushed under them, and the daisy cores that the frenzy of open fingers would scatter like yellow coin.

The old lady sat with her hands gathered up on the head of her cane, marking fresh circles in the mud with the agitated tip of it. She was outraged, being drawn out of the isolation of her own hun-

gers into the grossness of this alien thing. She sat beating off the intrusion with the precise dance of her cane. But her frail old voice kept storming up the hill after the young man and his companion.

"What could any good people be at in the hills all day, all day that way?" she said. "A good brisk walk is another thing. Can you tell me that?"

At night the girl would sit by the bed reading aloud in the old lady's room.

"It puts sleep in me," the old lady would say. Her underwear hung slightly stained over the back of the chair.

"The healthy school is played out in England," the girl was reading, "all that could be said has been said; the successors of Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot have no ideal, and consequently no language."

The old lady's head lay quietly on the pillow, repeating tediously from time to time that she was unable to hear. The girl moved nearer and nearer over the bed, leaning forward from her chair and reading aloud at the great naked ear. She knew that if she read slowly, slowly diminishing her voice, that the old lady would go off to sleep. Her face hung over the bed and over the old body under

the blanket. The old soft arms were bare out of the gown. She sat reading, and slowly withdrawing the sound of her voice. She heard it in her own ears, tapering and dwindling off, as if the solid rings of revulsion were pressing it thin in her throat.

When she knew the old lady was asleep she could think about the book as she read it, and wonder about language and if there were perhaps some now so new and so incomprehensible that it could serve only to wound them. She felt herself setting out in thought, reticent and proud, and bitter in a small clean way like a cat selecting its paws. But she wanted to believe that there was something fresher and deeper that came of the mind, some force of which she would demand nothing if it would only *be*. She wanted to believe in a language that burned black the tongue of the one who spoke and scarred the one who listened. She would demand nothing of it, but to serve it, and be humble before it. She was ready to be humbled, but adequately humbled, not by the hate that beat all night at her pillow, nor by the love that slipped off down her cheeks at night acrid into the corners of her mouth.

The old lady's head had fallen aside on the pillow and she was breathing aloud through her mouth.

The girl could hear the steps of the young man as he came down the hall. He had fitted the key into the lock and come into his room. The girl started reading again, beginning in her false gentle voice and blurring the words with her tongue. As she heard him moving about in his room she felt the stiff feathers of her heart beating against her ribs. He had come in alone and he was singing to himself as he laid off his clothes. She sat reading to the old lady, willing sleep like a death upon her, filling the great soft ear with sound to keep the sound of the young man from her.

Presently someone came down the hall, walking gently as though in slippers, and into the room to him without pausing at the door. The girl went on with her reading and whenever her eyes left the page they would fall down upon her own body, down the long hollow of her breasts and over her own hands and limbs. She kept turning her eyes in so that she could see something that was not herself, and when she paused in the reading she felt her eyes threshing back and forth under her lids. In the center of her mind was a small hard burning light.

The voice of the young man was sounding out as though heard over water, a deep swaying bell swing-

ing down like a tool on metal. And the silence of his companion hung between the two rooms, stirring back and forth between them like a soft soft hammock hung under strong trees. Everything in the old lady's room was meticulous and sharp to the girl, neat and small corners and legs of furniture tossed up like little boats on the terrific water which went on under and about them sending them dancing like crazy men, sending the little white tufts of cotton flapping like burnt butterflies over the quilt. The girl sat reading, pressing the book down solid on her knees and reading out the words; and the great dancing orgy of silence wove and tore strongly in the room, tossed up the little grunts of the old lady's breath like corks on the smooth mouth of the horizon.

She read for a long time in terror and pain, with her wild soft thoughts beating about the closed light at the center of her mind. When the woman had finally gone out of his room and off down the hall and left him alone, the girl could hear him sitting up in his bed and beginning to cough. The springs of the bed cried out like bats as he shifted up on his pillows, and the spasm that had no sound

of his voice wrenched him back and forth by the shoulders.

The old lady came suddenly awake.

"He's come in," said the old lady in a whisper. "Do you hear him?"

She turned her head to hear the hard quick beating of his cough, the beating of a peeled heart cut out of a body and beating dry and quick in the room.

"How can I sleep with it?" said the old lady's whisper across the bed. Her eyes were loose and dim with abuse.

The girl listened to the lean shriveled heart of the sound as it beat alone in the middle of his room with no grief fierce or great enough to come to it. And then it began to run in a frenzy in his room patting with quick hard paws on the glass of the windows. It was a trapped fox barking in frenzy to get out of the room, and flinging down with its soft gasping belly on the young man's belly, its worn thin bark snapping its teeth at his chest.

She waited for something to happen. She sat rubbing the palms of her hands dry in her dress. "But cry out, cry out, cry out, my love," she cried to him

in her heart. She thought that he would cry out with a great sound, or that he would open the door and get out from the thing and leave it cracking like a dry white fire in the middle of the room. But there was nothing to come of it, except for the sound to dwindle off in a point, even the sound of the springs whistling like bats, and the point to become a long needle of pain in her. There was nothing else to come of it. She emptied the old lady's pot, replaced it in the little table by the bed, and went down to her own room.

In the morning the young man came out in his soft grey clothes lounging and talking with his companion and moving in his fine white skin. She had filled her palm with yew leaves stripped from the little boxed tree as she passed it, and she laid them carefully out on the top of the table, standing and holding them down absently with the tips of her fingers as the young man went off to find chairs. He came drifting down the terrace to the table at which the old lady and the girl were seated.

"May I trouble you," he asked, smiling at them under his moustache. "But is this chair taken?"

He had put his hand on it as though to bear it away from them and the old lady regarded him

from under her white bang. She drew carefully in her glass of Vin Bourdou.

"Tell him it is, my girl," said the old lady.

"I'm afraid," said the girl without looking up, "that it is."

POLAR BEARS AND OTHERS

The polar bears came slowly, slowly, laboriously from the imitation-icycled caverns and across the cage, leaving no mark but the shadows of their feet as they fell on the false snow. Their shoulders and rumps were yellowed like scorched linen, and wearily, heavily, they dropped their bodies into the shallow basin and shuddered aloud in their skins because the water of it was lax and warm.

They came from a country which is a small country because it is all alike, and they came from it with life only if their country and their ways be repeated for them. They came with their prejudiced bodies and their jaws gaping out for fish in empty water. They are like people who live in small countries and who go out of them with their small grudges strapped to their backs. In America, and in Russia, the big countries, there are little men but on them even there is a smell of romance. (And I believe in romance: that it should be snatched from the but-

tonhole where it has withered too long, so that reality can make a fresh thing of this poor faded flower.)

There was one man and I know that when he was ill he would be in bed with a pencil in his hand, and he would draw on the paper on his knees dark long rows of turf with the lead, turning the pencil like a plough in his fingers. In this turf he would talk about planting the seeds, the vegetables and the flowers; he wanted to put the vegetables among the flowers as he wished, and often the vegetables grew much more beautiful than the flowers. The first tight bunches of lettuce coming out like stars in the black soil were always more beautiful to him than any opening flower.

Sometimes when he was walking he would see ferns set away behind some thorn trees, or with green stickers stabbing them. And he would go through branches as if they were as soft as spiders' webs, getting through the thorns to bring out the fern plants in his arms and carry them off to set them out in his own place. The long hairy roots of the ferns would hang down and soil his cuffs and his clothes, but it would never anger him. And sometimes we would see a girl with short hair and we would follow her home to her house and watch her

fine legs climbing up the path to her door. And if she looked back at him he would wonder about sleeping with her, and for that I wouldn't care. He would go off with his women and I knew that they stood on the edge of him and saw no deeper than the reflection of their own faces. There was a fire of love in his heart that was burning him soft and warm as metal, and if you did not know of this you did not touch and wound him with wounds that were sinister and wide.

One day he came in and told me that a woman was coming to Havre where she would take the boat and go back to America. All evening he walked about in the garden, working here and there among the plants, and I stood at the window and saw the yuccas running with moonlight, and the sheepdog pacing back and forth on his deep soft feet at the end of his chain. And under my nose Dushenka came and went through the black spangles of the fir branches. Because he stayed out in the garden with his thoughts I became afraid of this woman. After a long time he came into the room and I looked up and said no, that I would not go over with him to meet her at lunch. He was shy because he had been out thinking about her as he had been

working about under the stars. He stood by the table in the light and looked shyly down at the backs of his hands as if they were strangers to him.

"No, you must," he said, "you must come."

And for this falseness, I thought in anger, I could strike him in the face. We went to bed with our backs to each other and all night I said aloud to myself things that other people had written. All night I said that the heart knoweth its own bitterness, I said yes, yes, the heart knoweth that for a little while I was something carried in his wrists and I fell drop by drop from him until his blood was clean of me. I was something he gave up, something relinquished. The fire in him, it went out at night dancing, like an Irishman dances on his heels singing Irish. If I had cried out to him he would have come back, but that cry I held in my teeth, I held it until my sorrow escaped in sharp grunts like puppets jerked out over the pillow.

In the morning there was a warm mildness drawn in sweet veils about the garden and the house, and blowing gently in the windows. I came in with the coffee while he was shaving. I wanted to say something in a great hurry, something to show him the great beauty of my heart this morning.

"Yes, yes, I have come to believe in nothing but gentleness," I said to him. "Do you know—a piercing gentleness for others which comes from life and not from innocence. Innocence is obscene somehow, you know, but gentleness is the great wisdom of the emotions."

I went down into the garden with him with dry biscuits in my hands to make the dogs jump for them in the court. As I fed the dogs I watched Dushenka from the corners of my eyes as he went into the wood-house for his wheel. The dogs jumped about me, turning their bodies in the air, and the nails of their coarse feet struck and scratched on the pavings. Dushenka was in the tail of my eye, and he was pumping up his tires. I saw that he was doing it fast so that he would have time to go into the hen-house and feel in the straw nests under the plumed bellies of the hens for eggs.

I fed the dogs the last of the biscuits and they stood eating up the bits with their forelegs wide apart, and their heads low, with the slobber hanging in strings from their smiling mouths as they ate. Their tails waved slowly back and forth with the movement of their jaws. I came along to Dushenka where he was leaning down over the wheel, and I

saw how the cloth of his suit hung down full at the knees and how sharp little patches of other cloth were stitched in at the elbows. He was so absorbed in his work on the wheel that I felt he was a stranger, and that it had never been my fingers that had put the patches in his coat for him. And then he threw his wheel aside quickly, against the wall of the house.

"If I stayed here today," he said, "I could get the peas in, and I could turn out the old radish bed before the sun gets too high."

He went into the woodhouse and threw off his coat and stood in the darkness of the shed putting back the sleeves of his shirt. The dogs had done, and they came running upon him, and he held their wrists off, keeping their paws away gently with his hands. He cried, "no, no, keep down, keep down," to them, and all this time he had his face turned from me, as if in shyness. I thought about this and how when it came my turn to be in love, and I was suddenly angry.

"I'll be something more than sacrifice and bitterness to you," I cried. "Go on, get out!"

I knew when it was my turn I'd be off without a thought for him. "Listen," I said, "when it's my

turn, I'll be off without a thought, so you'd better go now."

Dushenka turned about on his heels and stretched his smile back at me. Presently he walked off through the cabbages.

"Not today," he said, turning his head back at me. "Some other day maybe. Some other time."

"And maybe a tragedy would be as big as life, but you'd never see it," I said to him.

I went upstairs and screamed in the room thinking that perhaps here was a great love passing him by, and he not even going after it. In the glass there was my own long face and my straight hair, and I wondered what he was holding onto in me. He would take me into big banks and hotels where a woman would have been ashamed for me. I didn't have any style to my clothes, and a woman would not have sat with me without looking the other way. I thought about him this way until I could have broken myself with crying. I wanted to say to him that I would take out my heart and take the words from it to say that I would do simple and gentle things for him before all love was gone from my heart. I went to the window sick with humility, and I called out to him in the garden.

"Listen," I said, "listen here. You ought to be going over to Havre."

His back stayed quiet, bending over the earth and working among the weeds. And I stood against the window thinking of everyone who was not him, who must have a way prepared to dignity; you who do not know what it is to go off and for yourselves be lost and lost and lost to all old dignities. You do not know the humble way of beginning or of growing a new skin when the old one is ripped from your flesh.

"You ought to be getting over to Havre," I said.

UNCLE ANNE

I

The family had left them together and Eve sat in the silence left after the door had closed upon their voices and watched the wind swinging the poplars in parrot-tails across the windows. Before them the fire roared from the hearth to the roof and turned the black chimney crisp with a fine crust of flame. Outside the grass ran on like a full sea.

The album was open at the points of Uncle Anne's waistcoat, and over the daguerreotype was a mist as if yellow veils had been laid between the pages. Eve twisted her bracelets up and down her thin arm. The family, she was thinking, up from the sea with brass hoops in their ears, with indigo bird-feathers curled over their shoulders and their rich black hair hanging like grapes on their cheeks. Uncle Anne was turning the pages and looking up

from the bright weary faces of their ancestors in the album. When he glanced up he would face into the mirror on the wall and move his mouth and his eyebrows at himself in graceful ways. Eve was so close that she could see the white sand of his pirate flesh tapering out through the reeds of his beard.

"This one," he said with his finger on the page "brought us marmosets from the Indies. Beggars you know. With their hands curled up as if they were wearing blue kid gloves." His face fell back in laughter. "They used to climb the fire tongs and use leather holes in their chaps," he said. "Once the tail of one of them caught in the fire. I snuffed it out with thumb and finger. . . ." He lifted his hand to show her the perfect marks of monkey-teeth still patterned in his wrist. "Well paid for my trouble," he said. When Eve leaned forward to see, her braid moved like a silk brush over the book.

"Freckled waistcoats," he said, turning the pages all at once. "Hair in the nostrils. Do you know . . ." He stood up and went over the room to the window. "Did they tell you that I am an ill man come home to die?"

Eve saw it hard and bright in her mind. It be-

came as real and as bitter as Chateaubriand's soul pierced on the bottleglass of the convent wall and his sister's love making a soft beach out to his exile. (Love could be even more faithful and fierce if the blood was the same blood in the two bodies.) There was nothing so barren in the world when he spoke of death as the black cart that had always buried the old ones; the grass curtseying at the wheelrims and Uncle Anne riding before them all and shaking loose in his cold skin.

Now he stood in the room with her, with death an ikon on his watch-chain, tapping its small carved feet against the pane. The silver bottle on the dresser turned up across the poplars and Uncle Anne sharpened the whiskey-glass with soda.

"Men come home to feel their roots," he said. "I am a lost man come back seeking a country." He put his hands deep in his breeches over his thin belly and talked over his shoulder, drawing her eyes after him as he walked. "The medical-men said I was to come back, stir about, cut the crops a little, and die. Do you see that in me, Eve?" Uncle Anne tipped the whiskey again into his empty glass, and then he came back to her and sat close on the horse-hair. "Eve, you are beautiful, so thin,

so beautiful, with little red apples in the points of your eyes."

The servant-girl brought in logs for the fire and dropped them down through the tenderness of Uncle Anne's voice. He stood up and shook out his delicate legs. The light of the fire turned his boots to metal, and his hand came out of his pocket and stroked his cheek.

"And this scar," he said, as if that was what he had been saying, "is from a wildcat that was lying like a snake along a branch in the forest."

The servant-girl was on her knees, listening, and putting the sticks softly in. Eve watched her with impatience and shook her bracelets up and down her arm. She could see the fire laying sharp swords across Uncle Anne's clean leather as he stood on the hearth, looking down at the girl, and balancing back on his black heels.

"A soft skin it had," he was gently murmuring, "a soft, soft skin." The servant-girl was listening, flushed over the flames under his voice. "A soft skin."

Eve put her feet forward sharply on the floor.

"You may bring in the candles, Ellen," she said in a strange sharp voice.

II

Uncle Anne would stand at the back-door with the shaving mirror nailed up on the timber and swinging before him in the wind. He would be standing so, washing out in the sun and Eve would come out of the door and watch his mouth moving and the blade below it lifting away the plumes of lather. Behind them the servant-girl would be moving about in the kitchen and they would hear her singing:

> Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty
> They shall behold the land that is very far off
> Thine heart shall meditate terror

It was this way on the day of the horse-fair and the house would be left alone. The mare was hitched up and waiting to bear off the family. The thin reins sagged over the points of the mare's old back and she waited in weariness with one hoof coyly cocked in the dust.

"No," said Uncle Anne at the last moment. He would not go with them. "No, no, no," he said.

He danced with his razor across the steps of the porch, and Eve drew the tips of her braid slowly

across her mouth and remembered why he had come home to them. Thin and hollow he was, like a flute, and death a bitter thing.

> The highways lie waste
> The wayfaring man ceaseth
> The earth mourneth and languisheth

the servant-girl was singing, and Uncle Anne said of her: "She'll cook me corn-bread and manna."

Eve followed the family to the wagon and as she crossed the court she thought of her thin legs below the pleats of her linen. She sat high on the seat and pressed her knees. The family sat all about her, erect as candles, and behind them was Uncle Anne singing and splashing the water and the long ring and grind of the pump under his hands.

Just before they turned into the woods Eve looked back and she could see him throwing bright handfuls of water over his head and throat, and the servant-girl in the short grass hanging out wet clothes.

All day in the heat the men talked back and forth, this one and that one trying to get the mare cheap because her bones pointed through her skin. Father would say that the mare was not underfed

but that an old horse doesn't fatten up once it starts growing thin. She'd do six troughfuls of mixture a day, he explained to them. She'd eat the fields bare if they let her at it. Eve thought of the way she had of slipping her long old head out of the halter and getting off through the pines. She would nuzzle off through the trees and rub her bones raw on the bark, and lie tossing on her back in the moss with her stiff legs crooked up under the branches.

But the family kept quiet about this and they came riding home behind a new horse with flexible new reins slapping down on his buttocks. Ribbons of moonlight ran up and down the leather from Simon's thumbs to the bridge of silver bells arched over the stiff square mane.

Mother was singing in the wagon with her voice shaken thin by the wood wheels shattering over the ruts. They came over the part in the dark hair of the hills, and below them the valley was filled with plum trees that were blossoming and soft under the moon. The house was a little close ear on the side of the hill, cupped hard for sound; and the darkness of the windows under the moon made mother, rocking slowly with the motion of the cart, fall silent between them.

When they drove into the court mother jumped quickly down. They could all hear the servant-girl singing softly in the darkness of the house.

And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind she sang:

> And a covert from the tempest
> As rivers of water in a dry place
> As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land

And mother called out:
"Anne . . . where's Anne?"

III

All night the grass ran on under the wind and in the morning Uncle Anne went out with the men. From the porch Eve could see the cutter laying aside the grass, the timber of it like a raw windmill and the scythe a bright whip in Uncle Anne's hand.

That was the last day. Mother and Eve sat together in the bedroom and mother held Eve's ribs against her in the curve of her hand. She talked of the pollen in the tube of the male flower, and of the soft seed-bearing stems, and so it was with humans, she said, and so it was with the beasts. Beauty was

a part of it, she said, beauty so great a part. But if the servant-girl was to have a baby she would have to go away in the same way that Uncle Anne was going.

She called Ellen in to them, standing with the door opened wide and her hand laid firmly on the knob of the door. And then she kneeled before them by the bed, and Eve and the servant-girl slid down on their knees and listened to her soft unshaken voice approaching God. And now was it the time for the girl to wail and cry aloud in fear and anticipation and for mother to strengthen her with a sad pure heart.

Eve kneeled, listening to them, and thinking of her own thin body under her linen. Her fingers on her breasts felt the soft hoofs of her own heart beating. And he will die away from us, she thought, lying in strange sheets with his mouth set up at the corners. She remembered the first time he had kissed her and she thought how shall I ever find him again, what way will I follow? She moved her head from side to side through the sound of her mother's voice and the girl's voice chiming together in prayer.

All morning Father turned back and forth in the

parlor over the roses in the carpet. And he said "never shall the name of Anne be spoken among us." Eve stood on the piazza thinking this of him when Uncle Anne came up to say goodbye. He was wearing again his thin grey coat and his rusty buckles and he lifted her braid from her ear with the tip of his finger.

"Whatever I have done," he said, "is because I wanted always a thin wife with pink nostrils and little red apples in the points of her eyes."

"Your uncle is a sailor," was the last Father said of him, "a brute and a beggar" and that was all.

PORTRAIT

When he was away you were afraid and put your slippers out quickly at the door. They had fine smooth coats and they waited like small seals balancing light on their noses. When they heard him speaking on the stairs they came close to each other and shook with delight like young girls. "Sacred Jesus, it is a world without milk or honey" you would hear of him. He would come quickly because he was happy, walking alone down the polished edge of the hall so that his steps would come first to you.

You were afraid and watched the room through your eyelids, singing in your heart:

Listen, my lids are sharp open shells
And the dark cannot change them.
Listen, he will come like a thin glacier
Soothing the wilderness, come like cool sap to the desert.
Listen, he will give you hard children
With flesh like the foam on north waters . . .

There would be a long time to wait and the voice of Tara would sit in the dark by the bed, fingers clasped lightly and elbows in black lace masks resting on the arms of the chair. "He must be a strange mother to you," she would say. "His breast is not as soft as a swan's for you," and her fine hand would move sadly over the bosom of her gown. She was sad, knowing that impatience was a soft skin cast over you. When she talked of women and their lives she did so with a sad completed pride. She would sit quiet by the bed thinking of other women, women whose husbands had starved in prison, or gone singing to death over the hills of their country. "There is so much death," she would say. And yes, yes, you would toss in the bed yes, outside, beyond, over there, "Why do you speak of these things, Tara?" Her hair is soft frail fingers clasped on her forehead. You are suddenly gentle with her because sorrow is her contemporary. And she would say "someday if he does not come back to you what will you do?" And in the same breath she would wonder if he thought your legs were beautiful, and you would turn in the bed and say, "Yes, Yes," to her, the other words she had spoken slipping away from your mind.

Your feet made white points on the heat, and yes, yes, yes you remembered down to the half-moons of your nails and out over the warm dark petals of the room. Tara sighed because you had only impatience for her. The long mirrors were wiped clean and when lights passed in the street the darkness stirred like a slow fan and the smooth mirrors were ruffled. "Then you will come back to me," she would go on, sighing. You thought of his keys like sleighbells down the hall, dancing together on thin heels in his coat-tails. "No, I shall never come back to you, Tara." He would be always coming with crisp cold sound to the room, with points of frost on his eyelashes and his moustache tasting of snow. And you were sorry that Tara could have only the straight arms of the chair and the tossing of the sheets over your head, and the hoofs of the solitary horses beginning in other streets and growing full and firm like round grapes under the window. Even the music of the hotel violins you gave to Tara to hang in her pierced ears and to be a crimped boa under her chin.

He would come and he would sing in the room to you, holding his notes up in his fingers as though his song were a bouquet of little glass flowers. Or

dance in the room on his thin feet, picking gestures from the air and fitting them to his body. And the geranium leaves at the windows would lean in and clap their palms together. His breath would be new strange wax-cool odor shaped with the designs of his absence. His kisses would be lettuce leaves on your fingers. He would find your ear and fit sounds to it, saying "Dawn. Spring. Child. Mother." He would sing:

> She is wild cool wings
> And a flight of stairs
> To run
> down
> lightly . . .

He would move delicately over the floor with his voice, talking of strange dark blonde foreign thin voluptuous women who had been black blood at his temples and smell of hair smoke in his eyes. The stories would be all on the fingers of one hand and broken off sharply like fingers. And you would laugh with him because you knew they were bright talk in his mouth to make your head turn with laughter on the pillow. When he said "sorrow is an old taste in my mouth" his voice was as bright as amber. He would cough in his chest and sit a long

time coughing, and he would say "Once I heard a man cough this way and in a few months he was dead." And you knew there was no truth in that either.

When Tara would come and say to you that it was so, you knew it was only that she wanted the blood up out of his veins and carried away in china vessels from the room. "It is true," she would say with comfort. "He knew always what was there for him." And you would beat the pillow and scream at her that his voice would be sudden cold glass in the hall, saying "Sacred Jesus . . ." he would bruise the points of your slippers because his boots were always longer than he remembered, he would come in and Tara would be your black silk gown over the chair, and the room would sit up in the light like a sleepy child.

VACATION-TIME

I was walking around like a nut in the streets after the train had gone off, and the black was all running down my face from my eyes. I was going like a crazy-woman from one place to another thinking that tonight I must get into something deeper, the eyes full, the mouth full, to be sunk in it, to wallow like a sow. What good would it do to drink if to go home to that place empty of any sound. A good deal of your violence is not I thought. The trouble with you is.

I went into one place where there was a man I knew at the bar drinking and I sat talking for a long time to this man I knew. I was listening to him talking with my eyes rocking in my head and when I had had a lot to drink I said I just sent my little girl off to the south I said. He was a Jewish fellow, fat like a mother, and he sat nodding his head. That's too bad he said. Yes, I could believe very much in something I said I could believe

in something but what it is I cannot explain. I am seeing that to be a believer you are to be blinded to your own satisfaction. You cannot believe and see clear at the same time. What about your religion I said I've tucked it away he said and taking something to drink in the place of it. I shall persist I said I shall persist in my belief in the spring in spite of the mud the eternal because of the moss gone soft under the soles of my feet I shall believe in the chicken-dirt the cow-flops the sow's battleground lousy with hoofs. I am convinced of the importance in smelling out snouting out the moment I am at present as sufficient as anyone without a philosophy.

And am I now gentlemen we ourselves seeking to outwit the interior to ravage the exterior I am not able to sit home in intellectual quiet I am beginning to get tired of what is sensitive unable to acclimatize I am for the gay the biddy a great thing it is to roll home in the furnace of anybody's mouth blasting rust like wine all night and no sleep but the brain too going hot as a black bottom.

but then morning gentlemen oh the morning with the long sad face the black eyes crooked in the mirror the rouge standing up like an army oh

beauty not lovely enough or strong enough someday I'll give you a piece of my mind and it'll be a great gift to you

I prefer the heart winging across the pillow out into the garden. How flat the clouds lie on mornings like these when I remember other mornings other clouds riding the wind of the last breath of do you see the light in the window the dawn has come over Monte Carlo isnt it too lovely lovely and he answered me I can't hear you the cocaine is ringing too loud in my ears

were those his last words to you

no there were more

and which my lovely strained-eyed lady pull your gaze out of the mirror for five minutes and answer the district gendarmerie. His last words to me were harsh ones I cannot bring myself to repeat them here before all these unmelting hearts have melted. He said I cannot hear you the cocaine

Did he amplify that statement

Yes he said that the cocaine was ringing like. She hung her head and said she did not remember. We must have the scene arrange itself cher with dawning yawning over Monte Carlo and the Sister of Mercy drawing her wet thumb along her head-

dress pleats and the bags of oxygen deflated in the corner. What were his last words Mrs. Stick-in-the-Mud

He did not draw himself up to his full height as a poet he sagged in the middle there was a bright fan of red velvet fluttering from his mouth and he was saying speak louder for Christ' sake the cocaine is ringing like hell in my head

I looked into the bottom of my glass of and I murmured to the soft blue clouds of gin I too I too should have spat my way to heaven with him

I said I am going home

Goodnight said the Jewish fellow. I said I'll drive you home I thought to be going out into the street alone would be a terror No he said and his eyes were sliding down the bar you see I was up late last night you don't know what I want I said I'm afraid to walk out into the street alone Sure I know he said but I don't feel like getting into a taxi I felt myself going out alone and I saw the Jewish fellow smiling at the bar because I was drunk maybe and I said to the taxi-man you drive down to the water allez filez I've got a heartful of misery to spill out I've got a long blue cape on that'll go down quick young feller

In the taxi I could feel the water of the river blocking in my nostrils and the chirp of the waters always there had been something to flatter me somewhere but now there was nothing left to me. And here is where you might have cheated I was thinking just here you might have insisted upon love. Here is where you might have got what you wanted because if you had kept the kid with you it would have had the whole world against it if it had turned out unnatural and refused to give love to its own momsy-womsy

Oh wonder-wonder mother-love why didn't I have a bit of you instead of this fierce agony which betrays me this decision of the soul which is decided for happiness and which results in complaint. Oh wonder-love which holds you by the throat until your breath is a red-white-and-blue celluloid rattle I will not have you warming your bottom on my heart. Oh wonder wonder mother-love how comfortable you would have made me instead of this thing scratching its thin back against a lamp-post

The taxi-man would take me home but he would not take me to the river he would take me home but not to the dark Swanee Seine for which my heart was parched. Willows as delicate as plumes

would have blown out of the wet soil of my heart and thought of me would have made you turn all night without any sleep in you. But I was in my own room running my tongue along the bad taste of it and then I began to beat the mirror with my fists. I beat the mirror with my fists and to keep back the sound of my own voice from crying I was biting my mouth until it was filled with blood. All night I was lying against the mirror because it had a human face to it, lying with my arms around the mirror soothing the sad old face that was crying in the glass.

SPRING MORNING

Albion must you fail me now may some force strike him the Teuton god if I cannot before he wakes get back the lip of a canvas as if it were a she-goat and recognize the teeth of it some of them suckled at Cézanne and some at the custom man's some of them elsewheres

or a signature to him by which there would be handle out of this peril that the sound of a finger moving sets ringing about the latest corpse in the bed with me indifferent as one his eyes in his lids bulging with all he has seen in thirty years of it as much a corpse as the one they lifted off the bed in his night-wear one morning and let fall into the coffin from a height that sent his arms wide open and his jaw dropping down and him grunting out loud

as much a corpse as the gentleman a timorous generation relies upon for brilliance Poetry he wrote is not to reveal the h'emotions but to protect

them from abuse I have them does he add in the false bottom of me derby the rabbits to appear with pinker eyes the eggs with thinner crusts

The first I saw of this stranger who slept dreary as a hog was his canvases turned to the wall showing their numbered backsides and the sun making me shy with a jolly white winter arm rounding along the edge of me I clung with my breath in my teeth to advancing toe by elbow every inch of it involving his waking outright a cat driven into fury ousted from its vanity to lie with its ears back in movement as sly as mine edging out of the sheets

by this time I had a foot on the floor and at the turn of a landscape there was Pruter signed Pruter 1928 Arcturus it is Hans Pruter whom I have done violence to up up Pruter my love roust yourself and be my noble crossing the yard and the underwear for a quart of perrier

His eyes had come open and he lay watching me every movement over the room

We have a friend in common Pruter

How near and dear a one asked Pruter I pointed at the gentleman photographed and framed

If I had money I would buy him I said I was putting my grease paint on at the glass

He could easily be bought said Pruter

For the pleasure I said of taking him through the countries that have their backs up the only wheres despair is not spurious

Buy him outright said Pruter body and soul you wouldn't be the first to

with the contract that he not compromise I said buy him and give him the door if he faltered him and rejoicing I would not have or him alone without his iron

You're making a grand show of him said Pruter with a yawn

I was putting the rouge on and the black on my eyes is it the poor bugger's fault I said that he is purpose and pride when everything else is rejected through a sewage of emotions

Pruter sat up on his elbow do you go away and talk about. Pruter I said you're safe with me I said. You could count the tendrils on his chest what will you say about me now said Pruter the corpse he was scratching his elbow asking me this out of his shame

There'll never be a word against you I said (what chaste reserve so help me Christ in that one framed upon the table what dignity retained like a

Chinese voice yiping higher and higher the sterility of a mule never fertilized)

Pruter I said was it my fault that poverty was the only thing I had to put down before him he came on walking like an ostrich stepping over the desert of me servility

you are lacking in something said Pruter it is decency

All the time you have been here he said we have said nothing of any importance to each other

(Sigrid you were the strangest having lived too long alone the kindest having died many times. This made you hard as flint I saw you once when you had forgotten. I was riding in the warm lit car my leg touching the steady leg of my own true love my nose breathing his warm whisky breath. You were on the curb when the car went slowly slowly slow as a glacier advancing and for one minute there was between us only the glass of the car window and you looked into my face I smiling the grin caught there frozen grim as your own country Finland. "Svenska Pressen" hail and farewell.)

All the time you have been here he said we have said

Lean out of bed said I and pass me the dictionary lean over the biddy said I and pass me the words withal

I am hungry he said for a woman appealing to me mentally as well as.

I held my nose from the smell of Pruter rotting and still above sod a lively feeding ground I knew these hard iron rings of sorrow and contempt laid first one and then another in my throat I would survive but not the face photographed and framed. If I had money I would buy him I thought body and soul for the pleasure

This I would never escape or find words to whisper

I have waited so badly I have waited but so badly I have waited so badly I have waited so badly for you what are you going to do

ON THE RUN

The little alps were baked dry and the grass on them waved in June like a slow fire along the rails. These little mountains ran in a sharp sea in the windows and the smoke from the engine twisted it in strong white ropes through the car. He opened his mouth to say "Saint-André-les-Alpes" and when he had opened it the smoke came in and filled it with bitterness. As the train stopped a soft pink tide of pigs rose out of the station-yard and ran in under the wheels of the wagon. The crest of little alps was burning across the roofs of the town, with the dry crumbling finger of the church lifted and the sky gaping white and hot upon decay.

He lay down on the bed in the hotel and when the bonne came to the door he sat up quickly and lit a cigaret. He talked to her, smiling, moving his hands, with his eyes insisting that she understand him. He wanted pigs' feet grilled in batter and breadcrumbs. He insisted with his hands moving to convince her

of the natural beauty of his hunger. A sick man would not want pigs' feet grilled in batter and bread-crumbs. She answered him shaking her head that they were not this time of year as if they sprang up like seeds in the garden. She nodded sternly, seeing that he was dying. "Later," she said, "later . . ."

Get her out of here he said I am going to cough Christ is this where the death will get me take the cigaret and when I cough walk around the room and sing or something so they won't hear me

The bonne came back to them saying that the washer-woman had so much work to do that she couldn't take in their laundry this summer. "Here's your laundry back," said the bonne, "because the washerwoman has so much work." "What?" said he. "What?" The alps were closed like dry fists and the grass burned up to the window. "My God," he said, "we'll clear out of here. Saint-André-les-Alpes what a hole. I'll come back and haunt you. I'll eat your heart out Saint-André I'll curse and rot you."

If there were a nice fine cold now to tighten up whatever it is shaking around in me hop around the room now and sing to keep them from hearing me a tight cold now pulling me together to say to them

The bonne came back to say that the shoemaker had so much work to do now that he couldn't touch their shoes for them. The mountain-trains were screaming like cats at the window. We're awfully near the railway anyway he said. If I laugh too much at he said my girl you don't understand the Irish until the sun kills me I'll be here none of your washwomen or your shoemakers if there were a fine tight cold to pull me together now he said I'd get out of here faster than the pigs hitting the dust get her out of the room he said I'm going to cough.

The bonne came back to say that the proprietor the woman luxuriously in mourning for her entire family bereaved in the fullness of middle-age would speak with Madame. Bereaved in the full sallow of her cheeks bereaved and the tombstones rising politely polished with discreet sorrow bereaved and remembered with bubbles of jet frosted on her bosoms and mourned under waves of hemmed watered crepe. I have mourned people for years and years this is the way it is done.

She stood in the stairpit with her eyes starting out of her you'll have your bread and your butter and your coffee Madame when you've talked

to me. "Come in here," she said. "Finish to enter."

The sweet sorrow of the crucifix faced them the rosary hanging like false-teeth on the bed-stead the sacred smile the Christ bled with artistry in the well-rounded arms of the Virgin. "Madame," she said without any hesitation, "your husband cannot die here," she said, "we are not prepared for death."

He sat up on the bed when he heard her coming back down the hall and he said what do you leave me for you've been gone a hundred years is she being rude to you? I called her a bitch he said keep your temper please keep it it worries me when you slam the door

"Saint-André," he said into the pillow, "I'm a sick man. I'm afraid. This time I'm afraid to go on."

You you afraid listen here packing the bags again the hairy-legged brushes pointed ampoules as beautiful as earrings bottles of ergotine and striped pajamas we're going on somewhere else and have pigs' feet grilled and champagne and peaches with flames running on them this hole dries the guts in you do you remember Menton last February and every time you read Umbra the cabinay flushed may the Gods speak softly of us in days

hereafter and the very small sausages for breakfast at the Ruhl

Saint-André-les-Alpes you're a perfectly ordinary piss-
pot
With a blue eye painted in the bottom of it
Fit only to be put in a cheap room under the bed
With education refinement and all the delicate belly-
aches
Here's to bigger and better pigs' feet

Keep on keep on keep on he said maybe I'm going to bleed

LETTERS OF A LADY

June 22, 1929

Sir Basil Wynns, M.D.
Buxton, Cheshire

DEAR SIR,

Your name has been mentioned to me by one who has never ceased regretting your professional neglect; a neglect which, because it involved no *contretemps,* seems to be distinguished by an ethical integrity much too rarely evidenced in a decade of facile visits. The explanation of your reluctance and your ultimate refusal to continue visiting my friend has been given me in what I believe were your own words: that Cherokee women riding bareback, leaped from their horses and after giving birth, remounted and rode on again. Moved by a profound respect I now address you with the request that you call upon me in the interests of my daughter's health.

Yours faithfully,
SIBYL CASTANO

June 28, 1929

DEAR SIR,

As you have apparently not perceived of your loss, I am writing to call your attention to the fact that during your visit to my home last week you left your medicine case in the greenhouse. I had not visited the magentas again since the afternoon you were so good as to appraise them, but as I tended them this morning, pinching off as you suggested those small leaves which uncurl wherever the stem is joined to the stalk, I came upon your alligator-case, so mottled with sunlight that for a moment it gave me quite a start, crouched as it was behind the muscat vines with the elegance of an actual beast. Whatever your wish may be concerning its disposition I shall be pleased to know.

Yours faithfully,

SIBYL CASTANO

June 30, 1929

DEAR SIR BASIL,

Upon my return from London last evening my servant informed me that you had been here dur-

ing the afternoon, and I subsequently discovered your letter which, I presume, you neglected to hand him, and which you had let fall among the magenta plants. I am grateful for the information therein contained, and acting upon your advice I set out this morning with my gardener the day-lilies and the iris root. They now form a triangle near the hot-beds, one which I am sure would interest you as alien to English design. This pleases me, for my admiration for the precision of England has definite bounds. Because of these very bounds my mind has begun to divide itself concerning the schooling of my little girl. At teatime I am persuaded by the sanctity of ease that all men should be Englishmen and all women born in Spain. In other words, that men should be taught to believe in the dignity of their profession, to follow a life led by interminable niceties of the mind; and that women should be schooled to elaborate this masculine faith with an embroidery of fidelity and passion.

You said the other day that Juno should be educated as if she were a boy, but what, it has occurred to me, would then become of that single

and personal thing which no education should touch, were she to be narrowed down to the perfected code of insular morality which for me signifies an English education? She would be permitted no curiosity, and no imagination, and while this might make her a better object for filial and domestic experiences, I for my part am not interested in her responsibility to me, but rather in her capacities for discriminate living. At teatime, however, I am reasonable, and I can therefore in reply to your request but recommend that moment of the day to you as decidedly my most satisfactory time for your next visit.

Yours sincerely,
SIBYL CASTANO

July 8, 1929

DEAR SIR BASIL,

I cannot tell you with what a degree of pleasure I received the blossoms from the hands of your gardener this morning! Let me relate the circumstances, which should make evident in some measure the greatness of my surprise and delight.

It was quite early in the day, and to recover from the confinement necessitated by putting jelly into glasses (a clear variety of lemon with slips of the rind set in it like crescent moons), I was on my knees at the flag-bed in the act of loosening the earth about those peculiarly native roots whose tenacity you know so well. Bowed as I was over the beds the rain-drops which still lingered seemed to me as big as hawthorne flowers, and the marks of my little girl's sandals were filled with the enormous lace of spiderwebs which she had destroyed as she walked. Living as I do in absolute solitude I have time to observe such things as this, and frequently the pulp of a rug, the threads in a bit of home-spun, and the pores of an orange-skin, feather for hours the wings of my vision. So it was that at a moment when two roadways which the ants had worn between the umbrella trees were as clearly defined as the bed of a river and quite as broad to me, the boots of your gardener took root beside me.

I was so absorbed in the manipulation of ant-eggs from black ant-hand to hand, and so unprepared for intrusion, that the basket of your flowers

set suddenly down upon the grass caused me to cry out with pleasure. Your species of hypatica is as beautiful as it was unknown to me, and I have spent the past hour going over my plates of the genera-plants in an endeavor to place it. The splayed leaf genus I knew in Spain, for fully a quarter of the wine-garden was banked with it, but your variety is extraordinarily unlike a flower, more as if the foot of a bird had imprinted its delicate mark upon a leaf of wax. It brought to my mind a number of like similes which collectors of the minute have left outside the pattern of their appreciation, such as the inner structure of a walnut-shell.

The miniature which you had already spoken of to Juno she herself discovered in the twist of raffia, and she has in great delight put it about her neck on a bit of velvet. I am sure it is a perfect one of its kind, but miniatures are to me so obvious in intent that they demand rather than repay admiration.

There is a glass of Barcelona jelly awaiting your approval at tea, but my thanks I could not keep so long and I hasten to send them to you.

Yours very sincerely,

SIBYL CASTANO

July 30, 1929

My dear, dear friend:

I know that you will be glad to learn that the timber has arrived for the garden-house and the men ready to begin work under your direction.

My happiness during the past days in watching you laying out the plans for the grounds and making of sand and stone beauty as subtle as a wilderness, is sharp in my memory. Your constant presence here made me feel more and more how like a drifting ship is this estate without a master. Indeed, despite my faith in women's dauntlessness, I feel that I have mismanaged affairs, for I find myself again this month obliged to dispense with two more members of my gradually diminishing staff. This time I have asked Nora, whose fruit-cake you once delighted me by praising, as well as one of the stable-boys, to seek other employment. My cousin has kindly offered to advance me notes upon my securities, but I am loath to avail myself of assistance proffered by a gentleman to whom I can make no adequate return.

Forgive me for thus burdening you with my matters. One of your own great qualities is an ability to wholly efface your existence and its de-

tails from the minds of others, and when I consider how little or nothing I know of what your life may be comprised, I am shamed by my own volubility. You know so well *de facto* the solitary ways of my exile: that Juno is my entire life and that the word "Spain" in itself is for me as if one had opened a window upon a brilliant garden.

Very sincerely,
SIBYL CASTANO

Aug. 16, 1929

DEAR SIR BASIL,

In the four days which have elapsed since your visit, I have had ample time to reflect upon all that you had to say to me. In particular your remarks upon morality have lingered in my memory, for it has always seemed to me that a man never judges morality or the absence of it in a woman in any abstract way, but always in consideration of the degree to which the woman may attract him. Even more true is this of an Englishman, for while an Englishman is lost if he has not a tradition to direct his actions, it is true as well that the question of morality is so closely associated with flattery and

with pleasure that even an Englishman discards tradition as absolutely worthless in this case and decides for himself.

If the woman herself does not offend his past, she has a sentimental claim upon him which is the equivalent of respect. A foreign woman I should think scarcely falls under this excerpta for an Englishman suspects all ways to knowledge but his own. It requires a certain insight at times to ignore a blindness as bewildering as an Englishman's can be.

You spoke of marriage with such feeling to me that I am forced to believe it a greater concern of yours than you care to admit. Fidelity is to me the one quality that one can put one's fingers on, that one can possess to perfection, and yet it remains a quality rarely perfectly conceived. Marriage as an ethical state for that quality seems to me as satisfactory as can be any law when narrowed to the point of a personal application. Hence your remarks upon the free nature of love I cannot take seriously as my life has been lived upon principles so antithetic to those you sponsor that I find them strange and flavorless.

But the discussion has interested me immeas-

urably, and in particular because it was discussed from the view-point of an Englishman, that is to say, a man whose first twenty years are entirely devoted to learning alternatives for avoiding that which he really wishes to say.

Juno asks me to send you all manners of salutations. I begin to find her already maturing, and her changing contours have this summer persuaded me more than ever how greatly do we both need the balance between us of an intelligence that has been directed and enriched by life itself and not merely by a contemplation of it.

Your sincere friend,
SIBYL CASTANO

Aug. 18, 1929

DEAR SIR BASIL,

It was indeed good of you to send me the photograph of your wife and two children.

As I look upon this cheerful evidence of your sane and happy hearth, I cannot but think how triply blessed you are by the sweet dependency of three such, shall I say, *human* faces? While I am

indeed flattered by the attention you have thus shown me, I am somewhat at a loss to determine the reasons motivating your generous gesture. As you had not at any time mentioned your happy connections to me it can hardly be that you send me the photograph with the wish to share with one so casually known to you as myself the indicated intimacy of your family circle.

On the other hand I have too much regard for the delicacy of your taste to imagine that this evidence has been proffered me in explanation of your suggestions to me concerning the freedom of affections despite the fetters of the church.

I am therefore returning the photograph to you by special messenger, and with my deepest gratitude to you for permitting me this brief but enlightening glimpse into your existence. In conclusion, I fear that our arrangements for lunch for the day after tomorrow must now be indefinitely postponed as I am called quite unexpectedly to St. Sebastian to attend a number of family functions pertinent to deaths and births.

Yours sincerely,

SIBYL CASTANO

Aug. 19, 1929

Dear Sir Basil,

I have received your telegram at the moment and I hasten to assure you how fully I understand and sympathize with you in your predicament. I can readily see how grievously your wife must take to heart the presumable loss of the miniature, which in reality you were good enough to present to my daughter. But consider as well the depths of Juno's sorrow were I to exact from her its return. I regret indeed the unfortunate circumstances, but I cannot see my way clear to demanding an immature understanding of an adult's indecisions. I must therefore ask you, as well as your little family, to content yourself with the grass-basket and the twist of raffia, which, with the dahlia-bulbs, my servant is returning to your greenhouse this afternoon.

Yours sincerely,
Sibyl Castano

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